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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses accountability in Brazil's education system. The first section presents facts about Brazil's size, population, geographical features, and culture, and it briefly outlines Brazil's educational system. In Brazil, basic education through junior high school is compulsory. There are enforcement laws to keep children in school. All schools are accessible to anyone who has the appropriate education. The second section focuses on accountability in Brazilian education. Until the second half of the 19th century, the central government was accountable for education, though there were some private schools. There are currently three government levels of accountability in education: federal, state, and county. Private schools may operate as much as desired, provided they obey the general legislation. The federal government is the main provider of education. In the last 20 years, the private sector has been more and more involved in educational partnerships. The third section examines the role of stakeholders, particularly the government. The fourth section discusses changing and expanding the concept of accountability (e.g., more government involvement in the technical parts of education, enhanced government collaboration with the private sector, and private schools' increasing independence from the government and use of educational technology). (SM)

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Accountability in the International Arena: Stories from Five Countries

Paper for discussion – AACTE meeting 2002

Nelly Aleotti Maia
Brazil

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1. Facts about Brazil

1.1. Size, population, geographical features, culture

Brazil is 8.507.503 square kilometers (3.266.170 square miles), with 150.000.000 inhabitants of which around 30% are under 20 years of age.

Geographically Brazil is an amazing country. No need to stress that it has the largest rainforest in the world but has also deserts, prairies, rivers (just to mention: the Amazon), mountains, lakes, as large a variety of animal, vegetable and mineral species as one may imagine. For more than one century Brazil supplied and enriched Portugal through gold and precious stones, besides agricultural products (sugar and coffee).

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Culturally the country has followed, by and large, the same political and economical route as other countries colonized by Europeans.

The territory of Brazil was occupied by the Portuguese since 1549 when the first General Governor was appointed. Although Brazil was "discovered" in 1500 no action was taken in order to establish any permanent settlement or to develop the new territory. With the Governor came the Jesuit Fathers and education began. This action was twofold: to convert the Indians and to educate the sons and daughters of the Portuguese. Curious as it may seem this last fact set a pattern for the next centuries during which education was viewed as something for the "elite", dissociated from the world of work or the labor classes and always should come from the government.

One should not forget also that as a colony the cultural, economic and political conditions would never allow the establishment of industry the development of commerce and the building of a higher education system, factors that would lead to independence.

In the 19th century due to Napoleon's conquest of Europe, and the invasion of Portugal the Portuguese King went to Brazil and the city of Rio de Janeiro became officially the capital of the kingdom. The independence came shortly after. Notwithstanding its political independence the country kept its economic colonial features, being an essentially agricultural producer and depending on imported manufactured goods.

A significant change occurred after the Second World War, when industry and commerce were strongly developed and, as consequence, the changes in education were manifold. Naturally a dynamic industrial society, with strong competition and the establishment of a democratic government demanded a radical change in the traditional pattern of a "liberal" education for the elite and a perfunctory preparation of workers.

1.2. Brazilian educational system – a brief outline

In order to discuss the issues of accountability and the role of the stakeholders a summarized description of Brazilian educational system will be helpful.

The last general law regarding education in Brazil was issued in 1996. It was named *Directions and Foundations of National Education (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional;* Lei n° 9394/96).

There are two levels of education: *basic* and *higher education*.

Basic education comprehends: child education (4-7), fundamental (7-14) and middle. Child education stands for day-care and Kindergarten. The fundamental is equivalent to elementary and junior high. The middle level

comprehends not only ordinary schools, but also technical schools which develop some skills and prepare for immediate work.

Higher education regards universities and special schools, institutes and research organizations.

Fundamental education is compulsory. Since some parents are not willing to send children to school there are some enforcement laws to prevent this. For instance: when applying for a job if the person has children he/she must proof the children are attending school. Another example is a compensation in money that is given monthly to the family for each child attending school. This sum, however is very small (less than 10% of the minimum wage paid to any worker).

In the rural areas, where children are not always able to attend school, because they need to help parents in agricultural chores school period is designed in a way to cope with this.

All schools are attainable by anyone who is qualified. To attain the middle level one must have completed the fundamental and to enter the university, besides having completed the middle level a specific examination is required.

The above is a very summarized description of Brazilian educational system. Who or what organizations/institutions are accountable in education?

2. Accountability in education

As a European colonized country Brazil accepted in full the government-centered pattern for education. Until the second half of the 19th century the central government (monarchy) was accountable for education, though there were private schools, mainly religious (catholic). When the Republic was established (1889) a more liberal orientation, mainly due to the Positivism of Auguste Comte, was introduced in educational thought and action but, no significant change happened in the cultural attitude that the government should be responsible for education. In addition to this there was also an expectation that education had to be centralized; consequently the federal government not only had to legislate but to manage, evaluate and control the educational system as a whole. The states had their own educational systems as well as the counties, but it has been taken for granted that the central government would be basically accountable for education and this attitude prevails till today.

This does no mean that the private sector is not expressive in operating schools and educational institutions. In fact, some very large and influential high schools and universities are private, but they have to comply with federal laws, which leads to the conclusion that their independence is mainly economical.

In short: there are three govemment levels of accountability in education in Brazil: federal, state and county. Private schools may operate as much as desired, provided they obey the general legislation. However, as previously remarked, the federal govemment is accounted for basic educational laws, educational politics and policies, and educational management. Of course this means to say that the government is also the main provider of education. By law no less than 18% of the revenue of the federal government is to be used for education. As for the states and counties, 25% is to be applied. In a country with the size and the social problems of Brazil (huge cities and abandoned rural areas; fast-growing highly sophisticated industries and untrained workers; great fortunes and great poverty, just to mention some) the difficulties of complying with these budget requirements are easily understood.

In the last twenty years the private sector has been more and more involved in education through special projects and association with the government but there is still much to be done.

Some examples of successful partnerships may be mentioned.

Since 1946 two very interesting organizations came into being: *SENAC* and *SENAI (National Organization for Commercial Learning* and *National Organization for Industrial Learning).* These organizations are maintained by a partnership of the private sector (commerce and industry) and the government and consist of professional schools. The business community contributes with a percentage (literally a tax) for the maintenance of these schools and send their employees to attend courses whose quality is very good.

Another example of successful partnership may be found in an association between the greatest TV chain in Brazil – "Globo" – and the govemment. A program using distance learning at middle level has worked for more than 10 years very successfully.

The Brazilian Army, through the Center for Personnel Studies (Centro de Estudos de Pessoal – CEP) developed for five years a program for teachers at graduate level in association with the greatest federal government university – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro – and benefited circa 3.000 teachers.

Some of the great industries offer some contribution to education through prizes but there is not a continuous participation in programs or projects.

3. Role of stakeholders

Looking at the foundations and building of Brazilian culture and society, it is easy to understand the role of stakeholders and why the central government carries the greatest burden in supporting education. If one compares these cultural circumstances with countries like the United

States, for instance, the difference is obvious. While the latter was colonized by selected minorities that flew Europe mainly motivated by religious and/or political reasons, the former was occupied by people that were forced to live there (convicts, or Portuguese soldiers or officials)[1]. It was a natural consequence that the government should provide for everything in Brazil; while the pioneers in the US had to survive on their own depending on individual initiative. This explains also, at least partially the autonomy of the states regarding education in the US.

The great stakeholder in Brazil regarding education is the government. As such it is the provider as well as the controller of education and it is easy to understand that this is a result and at the same time the feedback of a sort of paternalistic or patronizing point of view in which everything is expected from the government and it is also the one to be blamed. Another consequence is that there is none or little freedom for innovation, specially in the private schools. As for the government ones innovation is almost out of question, though, in a very contradictory way there is a general demand for innovative programs. In short: there is a great discrepancy between educational discourse and action.

To go ahead and come out of the standstill the effective tendency now in Brazilian education is to concentrate not only around the role of the stakeholders but the concept of accountability.

4. Changing and expanding the concept of accountability

All those who deal with education (teachers, administrators, politicians, parents) are aware that education is too complex a problem to be faced as an isolated social phenomenon. If one would be asked such a question as – who is accountable for education in a modern society? – there would be several answers all of them or none of them the correct one since the aspects involved are psychological, sociological, economical, political, philosophical and others.

In Brazil the conscience of the complexity of education has, in the last decade, forced decision-makers to act. The main aspects of government actions are:

- to be more involved in the technical part of education, not being responsible for the bureaucratic aspects only;
- to enlarge collaboration with the private sector (business

[1] An example is found in the names given to the settlements. In the US: New England, New York, New Jersey; while Brazil means *the place of the red wood*, which was the main source of exploitation at the time of the occupation.

community, industries, not only with educational institutions in a narrow sense);

- to encourage and evaluate innovative programs and projects.

On the other hand, private schools are also changing their behavior and the tendencies are:

- to be more independent from the government trying to attract other sectors of society to the funding or sponsoring of programs and projects;
- to be innovative using educational technology;
- to hire qualified personnel;
- to develop an intensive "merchandising" of education in general.

5. Conclusions

In trying "to redimension" accountability and to outline Brazilian education stressing successful partnerships or possible transposition of the Brazilian experience to other countries some conclusions are evident. The most striking:

- the difficulties for a large and irregularly developed country to offer and afford equal educational opportunities for everyone;
- to train teachers and educators in general to cope with technology and innovations;
- to attract all sectors of society to education, enlarging the responsibility.

As examples of successful partnerships:

- SENAC and SENAI and TV GLOBO.

This would be our contribution to this panel. We hope that the very summarized items will be enriched by further debate.

However, we would like to add to our small contribution some of the educational problems Brazil is facing now, in addition to the usual ones. Let us mention only the last one: the racial issue. Brazil never had racial segregation. Since the 40's there are special laws forbidding any kind of racism or segregation due to race, religion, sex, politics or any human difference whatsoever. Last year the government passed a law forcing schools and/or public offices to afford 20% of places for black people. Competition to enter the government universities is very hard. In some

courses like Medicine, for instance, the ratio is 30 candidates for one place. Is it fair to give 20% of the places for someone (even if he/she has not obtained the highest notes) just because the person is black? Most educators consider this as a severe form of racism and it has been a very polemic issue.

We wonder to what extent this crisis (or a similar one) could be a problem for other countries.

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